DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 192 879 PS 011 662

AUTHOR Coonrod, Debbie
TITLE Administrating the Admission and Grouping Policies of the Preschool.
INSTITUTION Debcon, Inc., Bloomington, Ind.
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 19p.
AVAILABLE FROM Debcon, Incorporated, 4503 North Northwoods Lane, Bloomington, IN 47401 (Cassette tape, $10.00)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Ability Grouping; *Admission Criteria; Age Groups; *Day Care; Disabilities; Grouping (Instructional Purposes); *Heterogeneous Grouping; *Homogeneous Grouping; Preschool Education; *Selective Admission

ABSTRACT

Factors used in selecting children for admission to preschool programs and factors that determine the way children are grouped within preschool programs are discussed. Factors that affect the composition and number of children admitted to a program are said to include funds, number of staff available, size of facility, current legislation and regulations about facilities, characteristics of children (such as age, handicaps, or success in toilet training), characteristics of parents (such as economic status or willingness to participate in the preschool program), priorities given to siblings, race, language, abilities and/or limitations of the staff or facilities. It is suggested that once children are admitted, considerations for grouping should depend on how to make best use of staff in meeting the individual needs of children in their growth and development. The two most familiar grouping patterns, mixed-age and same-age groupings, are described. Three advantages of the mixed-age pattern ("family grouping") are cited: (1) younger children show greater progress than in same-age groupings, (2) children can follow their own interests, and (3) teaching is continuous from year to year because the population tends to remain constant. Disadvantages of same-age grouping are noted. Other grouping patterns include developmental grouping based on ability level, grouping based on sex, grouping based on self-selection of the child, and grouping based on socio-economic differences or disabilities. (SS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED192879

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Debbie Coonrod
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ADMINISTRATING THE ADMISSION AND GROUPING POLICIES OF THE PRESCHOOL

BY

DEBBIE COONROD, Ed. D.

Jeanie, a four year old, has just entered One World Nursery School. There were a number of things that affected that enrollment, she will only be coming Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings because on Tuesday and Thursday the three year olds come to the nursery school. Jeanie also has another condition attached to her enrollment and admission into One World Nursery School, mother must be willing to participate one morning per week.

Factors Affecting Admission Policies

Admission into any preschool is not just a quick and easy decision. Many factors affect admission policies, one

PS011662

of those is the fee system. Some preschool programs are operated by Federal Funds. To receive Title XX funds, the majority of the children will be from ADC or low income eligible families. Most Federally funded programs will have specific stipulations regarding enrollment, for example, Head Start must have a ten percent enrollment of handicapped children represented in the total across the state. In some cases a particular preschool program maybe so expensive that it limits admission to only the middle income bracket or upper income bracket families.

Limitation on the number of children for admission is the number of staff at the facility. The Federal Interagency Day Care Regulation encourages a one to five in their 1969 edition and in the proposed 1972 edition a one to seven ratio. Most licensed facilities in most states try to maintain a one to five through a one to ten ratio range. Where within that range depends on the specific state in which the regulations are written. Daycare home mothers are limited depending on how many other children they have in their family under age fourteen (14). A mother in the State of Indiana taking care of children in her home, who had two children would only be able to be licensed for eight children between the ages of two (2) - six (6). If she were taking care of other children she would be having an infraction of the rules even if it were only for during the holiday or for care of an older brother or sister of one of the children enrolled.

The size of the facility affects the admission policy. Most standards for the preschool program require thirty-five (35) to fifty (50), square feet per child excluding the administration offices, the cafeteria, the restrooms, the storage rooms, to other areas children would not have direct access. This control for the number of children is based not only on the inside space but there is also a outside area specification. That specification is one hundred (100) to two hundred (200) square feet per child again depending on the state.

There are a number of contingencies in regard to the child himself that made admission possible. One of those is if the child is potty trained. Another requires that a child have a complete physical and that all immunizations are up-to-date. Another contingency that we have mentioned is parent participation on a certain time schedule. Often programs exercise priority for siblings.

The age of the child often affects admission. For children under two the regulations are different than they are for the child two to six. The admission is, therefore, very strict; it is even stricter for infants.

Within programs, the age of the child may affect whether he will be in a two-day, three-day, or five-day program. It may affect whether he will be a morning or afternoon child. Another contingency will be language. In some cases in our country, race has affected admission.

We mentioned age and we were talking about chronological age, however, readiness is sometimes a contingency. A

child may be asked to come and visit in the program while the staff observe and determine if the child will benefit from this group.

Other factors which affect the admission and grouping program are the purpose of the school, the philosophy of the school, the criteria used in the selection of children, the age situation, and the birthdate cut off. In some preschool programs the date used by the public school system is followed. In some cases that would be September 1 and in other states that might be December 1. Birthday cut-off dates vary from state to state and sometimes from city to city within a state.

Perhaps the criteria used in selection of children for the program is physical maturity. Are they able to button their own clothes? Are they able to go to the bathroom by themselves?

Another evaluation for admission may be based on emotional and social maturity. Is the child ready to be away from mother? Is the child ready to fit in with the other children? Is the child a beligerent and angry child?

Sometimes the purposes and philosophy of the school sets criteria of academic skills. The program maybe for the gifted child. Gifted preschool children may have been segregated for specific programs.

Check may be made of the types of preschool experiences the child has had or it may be mental age. If the criteria is mental age or if a test is used, then we should show parents

how that determination was made. Diagnostic tests can be used for early admission for certain programs. Some of the things to be considered are that early admission tests can be used to reflect the disadvantaged child, the handicapped child, and the gifted child. There are critical periods for learning and there are schooling factors. A child's development may reflect characteristics of the disadvantaged or of the gifted.

Administrative factors affect admission. In admissions we have many different ways of entering the child. Sometimes we have staggered entrance, so that children can be acclamated to the group experience. A few children at a time are worked with so that they get the one on one attention necessary to learn what the classroom rules are. Other programs take all the children in at once but do in-group staggering by increasing staff for a period of time. Some programs request that parents come and stay with the child until the child is secure and ready for the parent to walk out. On the other hand, a number of specialists in early childhood recommend that mother be dismissed at the door.

We've taken a look at who and how many can be enrolled in the preschool program. We have seen that there are a number of things that affect the composition and size of those children that will be admitted to the program. In review some of those things that have affected "how many" and "who" have been funds, number of staff available, the size of the facility, the different ages of the child, currect legislation and regulations about facilities, certain contingencies such as parent participation, if the child is toliet trained, if the child is

handicapped, if the mother is on welfare, the cost of the program, priority given to sibling, race, language, abilities and/or limitations of the staff and of the facility.

How the children are admitted depends on a number of things. In some cases steps will be taken to determine a childs readiness. A child may be given diagnostic testing to see if they reach a certain maturity level to be admitted into a program. Programs may give early screening of hearing and vision to children before being admitted into the program. This is being adopted in some states as a contingency for all children prior to admission. Another condition under which children are admitted into the program is through a staggered enrollment. Certain health forms and health regulations must be met. Another issue that affects how or when a child is admitted is the question of parent/child separation. In some cases is the parent ready to be separated from the child and in other cases has the child reached the level of independence that he can comfortably be separated from his parents for periods of time.

Grouping Policies for Preschool Programs

Once children are admitted, we need to look at the many factors that determine the way the children are grouped within the program. Every teacher in every school has a preferred manner for grouping children. The one basic consideration for grouping should be determined on how to make best use of staff in meeting the individual needs of children in their growth and development.

Many will tell you that children need to learn to be a part of the group. This learning to become part of the group is enhanced when children have a variety of experiences in different types of situations. It occurs in group experiences where children feel confident and successful. It is developed over a long period of time. Children do not come equipped with a knowledge of give and take and the skills needed to get along in a group. They do not have the expectation of waiting and taking a turn or of cognitively being able to visualize the advantages for following rules in a game situation. Because of the developmental level of the child, the periods of time that the child spends in a group needs to be limited with active types of involvement. The majority of the other time, young children need to be involved in individual activities. So when we talk about the ways young children might be grouped in a program we need to be thinking in terms of grouping for short intervals. Grouping choice and decision must be made on the criteria of what best meets the interests and needs of the child and the other individuals with in that group.

If we were to look at the two most familiar grouping patterns, we find that the two most commonly preferred are family or vertical groupings. In family grouping the ages of the children will be mixed. In chronological grouping children of the same sage will be together.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each of the groupings. If we take a look first at the mixed or family groupings, immediately one of the things that we have to recognize is that within any chronological age group there will be as wide of a range of abilities as there probably will be between children within the mixed family grouping. Just because a child is three years old does not mean that all three year olds will be preforming at the same level of ability. In any single example of family grouping you may have three's, four's, and five's all together. In one situation all may be performing at a three year old level emotionally but they may be performing cognitively at a learning center as threes, fours, and fives in the group. The reverse can also be true.

In family grouping in a daycare center or a preschool center in the United States, the grouping would probably expand three years. For example, it would include the three, four, and five year olds, or it might include four, five, and six year olds, or it might be two and one-half through five and one-half year olds.

Family is the term used to describe this type of grouping because older children are perceived to be teaching younger children, helping them, and working with them. It is seen as an extension of the home and family where the ages work together. Research has indicated that progress of younger children will be greater in this type of grouping than that of the same age younger child in a single age grouping or a chronological age grouping program.

One of the country's most credited with the successful use of the family grouping pattern is Great Britain and the British Infant School. Part of the philosophy that promotes family grouping is that children will group themselves naturally according to their interest ability and drive and, therefore, materials are set up that can be used by all children in different ways. The materials are not limited to a particular manner of manipulation and different learnings will be occuring for different children at different ages. This type of grouping follows Jean Piaget's theory for the development of intelligence. Within this type of programming individual experiences and maturation are built upon.

In family grouping children follow their own interests and are free to ask individualized questions. Use of the materials is whatever individual approach children find most challenging. Involvement and interaction with the adult or adults in the program is in relation to the amount that they initiate.

Another advantage of the family grouping is that teaching is continuous because there is not as much flexibility in enrollment. If the school enjoys a good reputation children usually return year after year. The child may be at that program for three continuous years. The teacher is able to follow the children through and assist them in their many preschool developmental stages.

The goals and expectations of the teacher in setting up the learning centers and preparing her materials are not age or grade expectations but rather a series of learnings and expectations for varying levels. Any particular learning station that a teacher using family grouping would set up, may have combined many, many forms of self expression, such as puppetry and painting. Learning stations may combine things around a unit or theme or a field trip, or any variety of things that the children might have come in saying they were interested in. If they had been on a field trip, she would have combined the different activities in the room around that area of learning.

In a chronological grouping pattern you again may have groups functioning in one situation at the four year old level and still over here in another learning center you might have another group of children performing at a three year old level. In either grouping pattern being administered you would have differences of ability. In family groups and in homogeneous groups you have some children being leaders some being followers. You have more of an opportunity for some older children who might not be leaders in a chronological age grouping to have the opportunity to be a leader and some younger children who would never be followers learning the skills for following by participating in family groupings in that manner. In chronological age grouping you also have leaders and followers but in some cases, it is very hard when children of the same age are together all the time to change their

leadership and compliance roles.

Children benefit from stimulation activity and interaction with others. It is important, however, that they be able to process the information coming in at their own rate and that they be allowed to pursue activity along their own areas of interest. Whatever grouping is chosen must support that individual predisposition to certain intellectual pursuits. When we look at grouping by age, we find that our society has developed a hierarchy that makes it very convenient for preschool and kindergarten teachers to group by age. This is usually established by the cutoff date when children can enter the public schools for the first time. The preschool program sees themselves as feeders into the public school program. Even once the children have been admitted those that come in the morning and those that come in the afternoon will be divided by whether they are the younger fours or older fours. Younger fours will often come in the morning because the rationale is that they still need an afternoon nap. Older fours will come in the afternoon because they will be able to go all morning long at home and still be able to come to school in the afternoon.

Grouping by age probably has more disadvantages to it than any other type grouping. It takes away the model of the older children from the younger one. It narrows the range of differences within the class. The breadth of interests are probably changed by having children of all one chronological age together. The negative affect for a child results from

the inclination of the teacher to expect all four year olds to have the same performance and maybe doesn't give the child the opportunity to display their higher developments in other areas. It is important for the teacher with this admission policy to carefully, carefully, moniter her planning so that all the inherit differences and interests within this age group are provided challenging stimuli.

Another way of grouping seen in some programs is developmental groupings. Here children are divided according to their ability level and placed together. Membership in a particular group may change. Membership in a number of groups will be assigned. As we have mentioned earlier a child may be performing at a three year old level emotionally and would thus be grouped in situations that make those emotional skill demands. Cognitively that child may be functioning at the six year old skill level and would be placed with three, fours, fives, and six year olds in situations that demanded six year old skill level performance. This is all fine and good as long as the child is not being placed in too large a number of changing groups and the structuring is not so inflexible that the child finds himself under a great deal of stress. Sometimes the harm of stress and being separated from a friend during these early years has a negative affect. We may even see regression in developmental areas. Usually placement in a developmental program requires screening and testing prior to school admission. Often this type of testing will not be available and a general check list

is used.

One of the advantages of developmental grouping is that the staff probably has a different type of qualification and is sensitive to the changing behaviors within a group of behaviors and skills. Staff will have some expectations and some goals in mind for the children as they progress. Materials will be more carefully selected and they will be sequenced to promote more rapid learning. Where developmental grouping is used to best advantage, teachers are providing more small groups with individual types of learning instead of highly structured units and are grouping children as they are ready for different skills. There are a number of other types of grouping that we will find. These are not used as extensively as the ones we have mentioned but one of these would be transition groups. These transition groups would be used where children are not yet ready for public school first grade but are for children who have already been through a year of kindergarten. The goals of the program would be continuation of the development of skills that are needed for first grade curriculum.

Other grouping would be by sex. We are beginning to see more and more experimental programs which have enrolled only boys with a male instructor. Or children may be admitted in a group based on equal number of boys and girls. This type of grouping does in effect have an influence on the type of curriculum planned. If the program has only all boys and male teachers it will usually be a louder environment, more construction type activities, more math and science-oriented

activities, more outdoor activities and more physical contact type activities.

Another type of grouping that we find is open construction where classrooms are open and children move between interest centers created within the larger construction area. This open construction can bring a number of pleasant experiences for children. A child is particularly fortunate if he has been placed in this environment especially where teachers have worked together to plan the type of supervision and the things that will be happening. Yet in this open construction or open space the young preschool child can easily become lost and withdrawn. The staff must be very careful to supervise and know every child. One reminder in open space or open construction or even family grouping is that it is very important for a young child to be able to identify with one adult during these preschool years. The dependency upon adult support is a very critical need for the child.

One type of grouping that we are very aware of in America has been created by the eligibility stipulation for admission written into federally funded programs. This stipulation creates a socioeconomical grouping that can be very detrimental. One of the things that we become very aware of in lower socio-economic groups is the lagging development in language skills. In federally supported programs demands are also placed on the participation of comprehensive staffing to meet the number of childhood and family needs found present in the lower socio-economic families.

One of the beautiful groupings that I have been aware of is that program promoted by Dr. Mary B. Lane. By bringing children of many nationalities and backgrounds together and by involving their parents in the program, a family of cultures interacts together. Surely this must have created some outstanding opportunities for human learnings by both parents and children. It must also have provided some unusual experiences.

Recently inclusion of handicapped children in the program has been another criteria or contingency for grouping. When we look at placing handicapped children in the preschool classroom there are a number of considerations that have to be made. We have to look at the extent of child exceptionality. What is the handicap? Will the child be able to function in a satisfactory manner in the existing program? Can the facility and the materials be modified and adapted to meet the physical needs of the handicapped child that is applying for admission? Does the teachers attitude and qualifications adequately provide a good environment for the handicapped child? Will the ratio of children to adults allow the teacher to be able to provide the supervision and promote the learnings that the individual handicapped child will need?

Before a decision is made about admitting a handicapped child the admission officer or director of the program needs to learn as much as they can about the specific handicap of the child applying. They need to know their staff's level of frustration and their own level of frustration. They need to keep their expectations positive but realistic. They need

to know that there is a certain range of exceptionality that can be tolerated by the other children and staff and that can be worked into the program without too much difficulty. It is important that children not view the child as handicapped or having something wrong but recognize that they have differences and the child has differences. Some experts feel that the handicapped child needs to be protected or the other children protected. It is my opinion, however, that we learn to make allowances. For one handicapped child that I particularly have in mind more space was needed when he was sitting in the group than was needed by the other children. Because he was unable to sit without throwing a leg or a hand occasionally, it was necessary to remind the children to leave a little more space. For a time this was difficult for the staff to arrange their thinking. This child didn't have to be held or to be requested to physically control himself when he was unable.

It is important that we are honest with the children when they ask questions about handicapped children. They need to know what to expect in the case of epilepsy or what comes next if a child has shown an unusual behavior. There needs to be continual communication not only with the handicapped child's parents but with the other parents in the classroom so that they can support their own child as he deals with the emotional response that he feels in seeing the handicapped child. In some cases additional volunteers will be needed to be brought into the classroom. If handicapped children are going to be in the classroom there must be someone that

has assessment skills and understands the sequence of learnings so that needed teaching techniques can be used. There needs to be an auxiliary staff available that knows specific information about speech therapy or medical technology that would be of benefit to both the handicapped child and the staff. One of the things that all of us are aware of is the need for more developmental information on handicapped children of all ages.

Current Issues in Admission Policies

Diversity is to some the beautiful legacy of the American educational system. To others it is a nightmare. Certainly we see a number of unresolved issues present in the admissions and grouping policies of preschool programs.

Some of these issues facing us include legislative advocacy 1) toward an eligibility-mix in federally funded programs; 2) toward comprehensive vision, speech, and hearing screening for all children under six; 3) toward accessibility for all children under six for admission in a cognitive program; 4) toward assurance of both sex-role models at admission; and 5) toward continuity in attendance at a program despite the increases and decreases of parental income. The issues while complex require a dedication on the part of childhood advocates to resolve.

Until children under six have equal access to quality education and care in programs, most children could be placed in a variety of excellent programs.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Butler, Annie L., Early Childhood Education: Planning and Administering Programs, D. Van Hostrand Co., Cincinnati, 1974., pp. 240.